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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Perfect Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Mapex cassava and tilapia, empowerment of women International call "Mapex fight against poverty"

Example of an innovative model: MAPEX CASSAVA and tilapia, empowerment of women

Empowering women living in poverty so that they can become central actors for change toward a sustainable world for all

Women are at the heart of change. Rather than considering them as a vulnerable group in need of handouts, they should be given the tools to enable them to become real agents of a better world. The Millennium Development Goals aim to build a sustainable world for all while curbing the growth of poverty by 2015. There are several Goals, number three being "to promote gender equality and empower women". This involves promoting the full and effective participation of women in building the future of their society while encouraging sustainable development.

What should be the focus of our work? Poverty is becoming increasingly prevalent. The majority of the global population lives below the poverty line. Even the most basic need – that of adequate nutrition – is not guaranteed. Food aid exists but famine is constantly lying in wait and increasingly wiping out the most vulnerable. The resulting physical and psychological weakness precludes harmonious development.

The concepts of empowerment and the fight against poverty are closely linked. The objective is to curb the growth of poverty and extreme hunger by empowering women, using an approach based on sustainable development.

What agricultural production system would be most effective? Donating starchy foods or a bag of rice is a good start, but is it sufficient to fulfil people's vital needs? We need to change the way we do things. We must find a way to enable people to regain their vitality. While I am grateful for all those bags of rice, the question remains – "has this addressed the root of the problem of malnutrition?"

Malnutrition, undernourishment and famine are exacerbated by water scarcity, energy shortages and war. Providing these countries with energy sources would be costly. Furthermore, the human body requires vitamins and proteins. Those vital nutrients are found in meat, fish, vegetables, fruits, etc. However, the problem is that such products require a lot of water, are subject to the vagaries of nature and require energy, which is difficult to access unless renewable energies are used, which are still very costly.

How can potentially productive people secure their livelihood if their nutritional intake is not sufficient? It is possible to have a full stomach without getting sufficient nutrition from the food we eat.

Which vegetables or nutritional elements require little water, consume little energy and are resistant to climatic disturbances? Transporting water to developing countries can be costly and complicated (requiring desalination plants, for example).

The model presented below seeks to reverse the trend. Hunger in the world is not inevitable.

The objectives are as follows:

- Populations must regain high productivity
- The most disadvantaged must be provided with vitamin-, protein- and energy-rich foods in a spirit of social justice and equality as part of a collective approach
- All people must have access to a balanced and healthy diet with minimal investment.

Women must acquire knowledge and skills that can be put into practice immediately and must then use them to benefit the entire community.

We looked for models that would empower women quickly and sustainably at the lowest possible cost. The Arawak model was interesting for its social and solidarity-based approach. To make it more innovative, we coupled it with an aquaculture approach with a view to triggering effective, large-scale economic activity that would produce high-quality, nutritious food. Such global action would enable:

- The social inclusion of vulnerable persons
    - Education
        - Sustainable prosperity on account of minimum investment
    - Job and business creation
    - Food and healthcare
        - Environmental protection
    - Clean and sustainable agriculture.

Social farming: A tradition among the Arawak people of Martinique

Among the Arawak people, the first inhabitants of Martinique, farming played a social and inclusive role by bringing everyone together in a common activity. Social farming will:

- Create business in communities
- Provide food and treatment

Martinique is a crossing-place of identities, as it is:

- A French island
- An overseas European region
- A French *département* in the Americas
- Located in the Caribbean Sea.

Social farming: A melting pot of histories that has not lost its roots

While Martinique should maintain its traditions, it should also benefit from the contributions of other cultures:

- Native American

- French
- Spanish
- African
- English
- Indian.

As a result, people have been immersed in other cultures and traditions and, taking a constructive approach, have retained the best elements of each while preserving their own cultural foundations.

The Arawak people used cassava extensively in the context of clean and sustainable farming.

That model clearly indicates that social farming can:

- Produce healthy food that benefits everyone; and
- Create a secondary activity..

Within the framework of this project, we are focusing on nutritional value rather than quantity. To achieve optimal results in food security, cassava should be combined with fish.

Nutritional requirements should be met to ensure that people are active and healthy. For that purpose, they must be well fed. Those who are well fed have energy and are therefore productive. The food provided should not simply fill the stomach but should offer the essential elements required for good health. For a country to be competitive, its people must be strong. Those people must regain their full productivity. People should not be kept on a drip-feed.

Needs should be identified based on population size. In order to reduce social divisions and to reach as many people as possible, it is necessary to work with small-scale businesses and local villages.

Having studied nutritional elements, we discovered two important elements that offered a healthy and balanced diet – cassava and tilapia.

Two excellent foods that can effectively combat poverty at a low cost:

(1) Cassava:

(a) Always produces a good yield in mediocre soils with little preparation

(b) Is easy to cultivate

(c) Is resistant to heavy rains, drought, etc.

(d) Consumes little water

(e) Is not sensitive to disease or attack by predators

(f) Can remain in the ground for a long time

(g) Can be propagated from cuttings

(h) Can be processed in many ways:

(i) Flour

(ii) Pancakes (sweet or savoury cassava cakes)

(iii) Cream

(iv) *Féroce* (purée)

(i) Its leaves:

(i) Are rich in iron, vitamin A, protein and calcium

(ii) Are rich in dietary fibre and energy

(iii) Have many uses (soups and purées)

(iv) Can be used to feed fish (fresh or dried)

(j) Its stems are used for cooking salt.

(2) Tilapia – "farmed fish of choice":

(a) Adapts well to all farming conditions

(b) Has a very low cost price

(c) Has a high rate of reproduction

(d) Adapts easily

(e) Is rich in protein, vitamins B to D, selenium, phosphorus and omega 3

(f) Reproduces easily and naturally and grows rapidly

(g) Has an omnivore diet (plants and animals)

(h) Is resistant to handling, lack of oxygen and disease.

By placing women at the heart of the strategy to implement outstanding projects and seeing them as a centrifugal force that will enable the most vulnerable to participate, we will be able to work together to build a sustainable and balanced world for all.